



## **NEWS RELEASE**

Tennessee Regulatory Authority

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### **May is “Better Hearing and Speech” Month**

**Nashville, Tennessee** – May marks the beginning of “Better Hearing and Speech Month,” a special occasion dedicated to increasing the general public’s awareness of communications disorders. It is estimated that 10 percent of Tennessee consumers have some form of speech or hearing disorder.

In celebration of Better Hearing and Speech Month, the Tennessee Regulatory Authority (TRA) is reminding citizens of the State’s commitment to providing specialized communications products and services to the disabled community.

“Through the various programs and services that are currently available, Tennessee’s disabled citizens can fully participate in the telecommunications boom that is underway,” say TRA Chairman Pat Miller.

The products and services are provided through separate State and/or Federal initiatives and are intended to facilitate communications between the disabled and non-disabled. They are: The Telecommunications Devices Access Program (TDAP), Tennessee Relay, and the soon to be available CapTel service.

Established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1999, the TDAP program authorizes the TRA to purchase and distribute communications devices to individuals whose disabilities restrict the use of a standard telephone. The program has distributed over 7,000 devices since its inception and is funded by Tennessee’s telecommunications service providers.

Tennessee Relay, on the other hand, puts operator-assisted telecommunications services at the fingertips of deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech impaired citizens.

Accessible from anywhere in Tennessee by dialing (7-1-1), Tennessee Relay enables persons who use specialized telephone equipment, such as teletype or tele-braille machines, to communicate with persons who use regular telephones. The service is provided free to users and is a regulated service paid for through a special fund set up by the Federal Communications Commission and the TRA.

A relative newcomer to the range of products and services that are available to the hard of hearing and late-deafened community is captioned telephone, or CapTel service. Soon to be offered in Tennessee, CapTel is an emerging technology that allows individuals with hearing loss to use the telephone without the audible assistance of a special operator.

With CapTel the user's telephone conversation is "captioned" on a special screen located on the telephone by an operator that is using voice recognition technology. This new service will be offered in the near term.

Better Hearing and Speech Month is a national initiative of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. To learn more, visit [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org).

Additional information about the Telecommunications Devices Access Program, Tennessee Relay, or CapTel can be obtained by calling the TRA at 1-800-342-8359 Ext. 179, or by visiting [www.state.tn.us/tra](http://www.state.tn.us/tra).

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